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RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA 0156
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM 1194
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1196
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1324
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1728
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1034
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 001316

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ELA, PRM/AFR
GENEVA FOR RMA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/25/2018

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [EG](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: EGYPT: HEADING OFF FUTURE FORCIBLE RETURNS OF
ASYLUM SEEKERS

REF: A. SECSTATE 67937

[1](#)B. CAIRO 1258

Classified by Ambassador Margaret Scobey for reason 1.4 (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action cable. Please see paragraphs 2 and 3 for action requested.

[1](#)2. (C) It is too soon to tell if Egypt's recent forced repatriation of Eritreans likely eligible for refugee protections (ref B) is a one-time occurrence or portends a full-scale reversal of Egypt's so-far generous position towards the large number of mostly African refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants in the country. We plan to continue to engage with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and Ministry of Interior (MOI) at both the Ambassadorial and working levels to head off any further Egyptian deportations of Eritreans or other asylum-seekers before referring them to the UNHCR for refugee status determinations, and we request Department clearance on paragraph 4 proposed talking points.

[1](#)3. (C) We note that the GOE is focused on resettlement as a long-term solution for the Eritrean population, and welcome ref A plan to engage with the UNHCR and the international community to develop a concrete proposal to assist Egypt with its refugee concerns and deflect the possibility of future returns. We request that any such proposal specifically address what the UNHCR, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Israeli government, or international community could do to decrease the appeal of Israel as a destination for African illegal migrants. The GOE has previously been cool to our suggestions of tripartite discussions between the GOE, GOI, and UNHCR on this subject, but may be more receptive to a concrete and viable international proposal given their call for international resettlement assistance.

[1](#)4. (C) Proposed talking points:

-- We recognize that Egypt is both a destination and transit country for asylum seekers and economic migrants, that some of these persons who have illegally entered Egypt have committed crimes against Egyptian citizens and present a public safety concern, and that Egypt has a right and obligation to its citizens to properly control its borders.

-- We share your concern about the continued flow of mostly African asylum seekers and economic migrants transiting Egypt

in illegal attempts to reach Israel. We recognize that Egypt faces legitimate security concerns over the smuggling of people, and potentially of weapons and narcotics.

-- We commend Egypt for historically maintaining a generous asylum policy, even while facing large flows of asylum seekers. Egypt has been particularly generous to the hundreds of thousands of Sudanese asylum seekers and economic migrants in the country.

-- However, we are concerned by credible reports that your government has recently returned several hundred Eritrean asylum seekers to Eritrea, before they could be properly interviewed and processed by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

-- From the humanitarian perspective, the UNHCR has called for countries to refrain from all returns of rejected asylum seekers to Eritrea and instead grant them some complementary form of protection, due to well-founded fears of persecution - including torture - upon their return.

-- From a practical standpoint, it is not clear that returning these Eritreans will deter others from illegally entering Egypt and/or illegally transiting Egypt onwards to Israel. We note that dozens of Africans attempting to illegally cross from the Sinai to Israel have been killed by Egyptian security forces over the past year, and that these incidents have not deterred others from making the attempt.

-- Finally, we note that large-scale forced repatriation of Eritreans are a human rights concern that will likely attract the interest of members of the U.S. Congress.

-- We ask that you work with the UNHCR and your international partners on this issue rather than unilaterally deporting Eritrean asylum seekers.

-- The U.S. stands willing to consider any resettlement case referred to us by the UNHCR in Egypt. We have resettled over 10,000 Sudanese refugees referred by the UNHCR in Egypt, primarily between 1998 and 2006, and we have resettled over 1500 Eritrean refugees since 2005 from the Near East and Horn of Africa. We are in discussions with the UNHCR and other international partners to determine how this difficult issue might be addressed, given the increased flows of asylum seekers particularly from Eritrea.

SCOBAY